



ECSU Student Center and Student Activities Office *Co-curricular education for student organizational leadership*

CONSTITUTIONAL FUNDAMENTALS

The constitution of an organization contains the fundamental principles which govern its operation. The by-laws establish the specific rules of guidance by which the group is to function. All organized groups should have their basic structure and methods of operation in writing. Not only is this a requirement of a recognized student organization at Eastern Connecticut State University, but it assists in the continuity, consistency, and unity of the group.

A constitution allows members and potential members to have a better understanding of what the organization is all about and how it functions. If you keep in mind the value of having a written document that clearly describes the basic framework of your organization, the drafting of the constitution will be a much easier and more rewarding experience.

WHAT SHOULD BE COVERED BY A CONSTITUTION

At Eastern Connecticut State University, every organization which seeks recognition must submit three copies of their constitution to the Student Activities Office. The objective is to draft a document that covers specific topics in a simple, clear, concise manner. Lay the information out in outline format; this makes it much easier to read. The constitution of an officially registered organization must minimally contain the following information:

- ◆ **Article I**
In this section, state the official name of the organization. An organization's name may not duplicate the name of any other recognized student organization.
- ◆ **Article II**
This section contains the purpose of your organization.
- ◆ **Article III**
This section involves the mandatory non-discrimination statement. It must be word for word as follows:
"As members of a recognized student organization at Eastern Connecticut State University, we admit students to our organization without regard to race, age, religion, color, gender*, disability, sexual orientation, or national or ethnic origin. All rights, privileges, programs, positions, and other activities generally accorded or available to our organization are equally available to each member of our organization."
[* fraternities, sororities, and single-gender independent organizations are exempt from the "gender" provision listed in the statement]
- ◆ **Article IV**
Your membership requirements and dues are addressed here. Membership must be open (with the exception of fraternities, sororities, and gender-specific independents) without regard to age, race, creed or religion, color, handicap, sex, national origin, ancestry, sexual orientation, or political affiliation.
- ◆ **Article V**
The due process procedures are the mechanics which your organization uses to ensure that all persons

are treated fairly in disciplinary matters, etc. It includes information concerning the rights, duties, resignation, and expulsion due process of the membership.

◆ **Article VI**

This section states the regular meeting time and makes provision for calling special meetings. If meetings cannot be held regularly, authority to call meetings may be stated here.

◆ **Article VII**

This section provides for membership dues and establishes the procedure to be used for disbursement of funds in the event the organization should dissolve (if Student Activity Fee (SAF) funds are at issue, those funds will be returned to the SAF pool upon the organization's dissolution).

The constitution covers the fundamental principles but does not define specific procedures. By-laws detail the procedures your group must follow to conduct business in an orderly manner (although they are not required). They provide further definition of the Articles of the Constitution and can be changed more easily as the needs of the organization change.

BY- LAWS

By-laws must not contradict provisions in the Constitution. They generally contain specific information on the following topics:

- ◆ duties of the executive board and each officer
- ◆ what the organization defines as a "quorum" for purposes of conducting business
- ◆ a provision for some accepted rules of order or parliamentary procedure to conduct a business meeting; traditionally "Robert's Rules of Order"
- ◆ date and method of selecting officers and delineating their duties
- ◆ detailed information concerning the rights, duties, resignation, and expulsion due process of the membership and officers
- ◆ a provision for amending the by-laws by the organization with little difficulty; usually a simple majority vote is enough, but the mechanism should be flexible and one that is established by the body

If you would like additional help developing your constitution, contact the Student Activities Office.

ONCE YOU'VE GOT THEM, WHAT DO YOU DO WITH THEM?

Remember the reasons for having a constitution and by-laws. They articulate the purpose of your organization and spell out the procedures to be followed for its orderly functioning. Constitutions usually require a two-thirds vote of the membership for adoption. By-laws only require a simple majority for passage. Once you have developed your constitution and by-laws, review them often (at least yearly). The needs of your group will change over time, and it is important that the constitution and by-laws are kept up to date to reflect the current state of affairs.

Make sure every new member of the organization has a copy of your constitution and by-laws. This will help to unify your members by informing them of the opportunities that exist for participation and the procedures they should follow to be an active, contributing member. A thorough study of the constitution and by-laws should be a part of officer training and transition.

REFERENCE

Adapted from: St. Norbert College, Department of Leadership, Service & Involvement